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The Marriage of Nausicaa
and Other Poems

The
Marriage of Nausicaa
And Other Poems
By L. M. Crump C.I.E.

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TO MY WIFE

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THE MARRIAGE OF NAUSICAA

φῆ ποτέ Ψαίικων ἀνδρῶν ἐνεργέα νῆα
ἐκ πομπῆς ἀνιοῦσαν ἐν ἡεροιδέῃ πόντῳ
ραιοσέμεναι, μέγα δ' ἤμιν ὄρος πόλει ἀμφικάλυψεν.

Odyssey viii, 567-9.

THE shadow of the shrouding mountain creeps
From house to house, from olive grove to grove,
Dark'ning the sun-kiss'd city; and the talk
Of those who chaffer in the market-place,
Dries like a water channel, blocked at source
By farmers careful of their sated fields.
Meanwhile, to lips of woman, man and child,
Throughout the ebbing throng, there leaps a curse—
A curse upon a name, whose music rings
As rich and haunting in my ears, as when
I heard it first,—aye, and will ever ring
Within my soul, until, my obol paid,
Old Charon ferries me across the Styx.

Odysseus! Oh! can I, can any one
Of those dull fools who sat around the board,
Forget the instant kindling of our hearts,
Like tinder, at the lightning of that name.
'I am Odysseus, old Laertes' son,
Known unto all men for my cunning wiles,
And up to heaven the fame of me ascends.'
To them 't was but the proem to a tale
Such as no banqueters had ever heard,
Nor ever will, until the earth shall drop
Back in the maw of Chaos: but to me
The long-pent echo of my heart's swift cry,

THE MARRIAGE OF NAUSICAA

Torn from me almost ere I saw the man,
The hero, in that salt-encrusted shape,
Which bursting on my maiden covey sent
The timid birds a-scurry to the rocks.

I needed not the raiment, nor the bath,
Nor glory shed by Pallas on his head,
To know the man, to whom my soul was kin,
The man, to whom I would give myself with joy,
Thanking the Gods I had myself to give.
I knew him for some great one from the first:
And ere he spoke, yea, ere the feast began,
I stole behind a pillar, told my heart
As clearly as a Grecian maiden might,
Bidding him not forget me, when he came
To his own land, nor all he owed to me.
I knew 'twas vain: Alcinous ere this
Had tempted him, by offering me as bride,
To cast off Ithaca and all it held—
A wife forgotten and a son unknown.
I knew 'twas vain or he had not given forth
Those winged words, when first he spoke to me,
And in their utterance made fulfilment vain—
'A husband and a home and a full heart
In tune with his—yea, all that you desire—
For on this earth there is no better thing
Than when, in unity of heart and mind,
Husband and wife together keep the house—
To their foes, envy, to their friends, delight—
And their own hearts know their own joy the best.'

THE MARRIAGE OF NAUSICAA

Did but to-morrow's sun see me the bride
Of him, my virgin heart sprang out to claim,
Knowing him straightway as its own true mate,
There were no need to pray the Gods for gifts.
For him I would loose this maiden zone of mine,
Give in his hands this body, which he saw
Spear-straight and bright as that palm shoot which
springs

In Delos, by Apollo's sacred shrine,
And, taking his dear head unto these breasts,
From him receive the gift for which I yearn—
The seed of children worthy of us twain.
The joy of giving, which I might have had,
Giving myself to manhood such as his!
And oh! the sons, the sons I might have borne,
Not far behind the father who begat,
Fit for all bold adventure nor less famed
Than he for cunning counsel and for guile!

He knew it all, yet, knowing, sailed away
To the cold embraces of a faded wife.
And I . . .

And I, who was the woman born for him,
Cannot e'en seek to wed outside this isle.
No! I must marry one of my own folk,
These soft fair-weather sailors, all afraid
To put to sea and brave Poseidon's wrath,
Since when the ship that bore Odysseus home
Was shattered by the levin, and the shade
Of yon dark mountain shrouded in the town.

THE MARRIAGE OF NAUSICAA

They think to show their manhood in their sports,
But I remember how Laodamas
On his own natural foolishness set seal,
When mockingly he bade the stranger, worn
By many cares and toils of sea and soul,
Join in their contests: and how my heart whirled,
One with the stone, high o'er the cowering crowd,
And flew with it beyond the furthest mark.
Their joys are not in deeds, that call for men,
Nor e'en in sports, that make a test for men.
They live for music, dancing, and for feasts,
Changes of raiment, long luxurious baths,
And then, to dalliance with their duller wives,
Who judge them, love them for their female grace.
I chose the best of what the isle provides,
Euryalus, my brother's dearest friend,
The least unmanlike. He will honour me
With meet observance of my state and rank,
And I shall be a wife all dutiful,
And see him, bathed and rubbed with olive oil,
Gleam in white raiment, when he goes to dance
Or to the Council, while I sit at home,
Busy with household cares and weaving wool,
For ever by the hearth, where his return
Will bring no joy.
Oh! what a cold dull fate to mate with one
Whose nothingness I have known from childhood up!
Proud of his beauty as the vainest girl!
Graceful to wonder, when he leads the dance!

THE MARRIAGE OF NAUSICAA

But with no spark of that diviner fire,
The High Gods kindle in heroic souls.
His soul is shallow—I shall never need
To ponder o'er his meaning, or to drop
My woman's line to plumb the depths, that lie
Beneath the surface of the bright lagoon.
The sea is charted: no unfathomed deeps
No sunset isles, no mystery, no lure!
He will be gentle, bring his cares to me,
And I shall soothe him, and, when quarrels rise,
For him and others I shall loose the knot,
Decaying all my life in honoured ease.
Honour and ease! and bitter envy, too,
O' the pangs and pride of womenfolk, whose men,
With souls afire, go forth to fight with Gods,—
With Ares on the bloody field of War,
Or with Poseidon on the surging seas,—
Resolved to meet fate's uttermost demand
Or come rejoicing, crowned with deathless bays,
To take the city's homage, and to find,
In the warm bosoms of their waiting wives
Spirits fit to mate with theirs, and all ablaze
To give with twice the zest of peace-time love
The treasure of their bodies and their hearts.

So all the day, when sitting with my maids,
I'll day-dream of Odysseus: and at night,
Though in Euryalus' enfolding arms,
I'll dream I'm lying on another breast,
Upon that heart, that joyed in war at Troy,

THE MARRIAGE OF NAUSICAA

That, battling with the Cyclops and the sea,
Won through to tell how great a fight it fought.
Then like a wraith, the chill grey thought will rise,
How my own life was shattered like the ship,
That carried him to far-seen Ithaca,
And o'er the sun-lit garden of my dreams
The shrouding mountain's gloomy shade will creep.

ODYSSEUS' REVERIE

'TIS sweet to lie beneath the olive's shade
Here on the hill-side, gazing o'er the sea,
Once dreaded foe, to-day reminder dear
Of past adventure: sweet within the house
To watch my beautiful Penelope
Her hair as black, her skin as ivory-white,
As when I led her from her father's house
To be my bride, her quiet face alight
With all the sure serenity attained
In twenty endless years, through which her heart
Clave fast, like clinging ivy to the oak,
To the far memory of twelve happy months
Of wedded love: to see Telemachus,
Inheritor of all her calm wise blood,
Busy about the palace and the farm
And all the island matters. Yet—oh! hark!
Hark to that voice! The rising falling song
Of gathering breaking waves on yonder beach
Pours through my ears the self same fiery lust,
That burned me, when I struggled in the ropes
Which held me bound against the Sirens' spell.
It is the same enchanting wordless tune,
And always calling—at night's milking-time
And in these day-dreams—even now it stirs
My quiet autumn, and with spring-time zest
Sets my dull sap a-leaping, till I throb
Afresh with all the pain and joy of youth.
I was born hungry for the feast of life

ODYSSEUS' REVERIE

And wearied never, save when tethered fast
By double manacle of keel-less seas
And lorn Calypso's cloying tenderness.
Calypso! Circe! why Penelope
Vexes her heart with jealousy of them
Passes all thinking. True, I used their love,
Circe's, to bind her magic to my aid,
Calypso's, half in pity, yet in hope
That one day, tiring of the counterfeit,
She would set me free to sail, and sail herself
To find the truth of love, whereof she dreamed.
They did not hold my heart: that never leapt
At pipe alone of common sensual note.
My tent knew no Briseis: nor at fall
Of Troy did I pick out a captive maid
For my companion on the homeward voyage
To fire a jealous wife with murder heat
Like Agamemnon. 'Spite of all my guile
I always steered by my Penelope,
And wandered never.

Yet am I so sure?

Nausicaa, that fair Phaeacian maid
Set on the razor's edge my own return
And all Penelope's fond joy therein!
That was the test—and yet no question's made
And no doubt spoken! I was faithful, then,
Against temptation probing to the deep
And inward marrow of my manhood's soul.

ODYSSEUS' REVERIE

For I was tempted, tempted by the girl,
And by her father, and by happy dreams
Of rest and careless ease in that fair isle,
Of music, dancing, feasting and of love:
Most by the girl herself—how clean she looked,
How high she held her head,—no fear, no shame
When I came towards her, and behind the branch
Which I had plucked to hide my nakedness,
She saw me there, dishevelled, with salt scurf
Crusted about me, hanging from my hair,
A horrid monster of the teeming deep.
Screaming, her maidens fled— she did not flinch
But faced me squarely, both arms hanging down
And fingers lightly laid upon her thighs,
Her violet eyes set steadily at mine,
And when she spoke, she spoke in level tone.
I loved her for it. Here's a maid, thought I,
Spear-straight, blade-bright, and perfect in her poise,
A sea-king's daughter, fit to mate with kings
And bring forth children who would shake the throne
Of Zeus in high Olympus. Then I spoke,
Praying the Gods grant her what all maids ask—
A husband and a home and happiness;
And it flashed through me 'Were I but the groom,
The bridal bed would not be waiting long.'
Yet that's not half: for all her loveliness
Of face and form she had not moved me so,
Had I not felt, with scorching as of flame,

ODYSSEUS' REVERIE

An equal spirit that could share with me
The long night-watches of my patient heart,
Could plan with me, and with undaunted eyes
Outface the losing chances, waiting still
To seize the winning opportunity
And hold fast to it through the buffeting
Of angry seas, of raging foes, of Gods
More fell than either. And I wonder now
If she it was who set her father on,
Or was he merely garrulously kind,
When he said 'stay and take the maid to wife!'
Ah well! he babbled on: I took no heed
And gave no answer, but I saw the thought
Flame in her eyes and burn within her breast,
When she last spoke to me before the feast.
And when I promised I would worship her
For ever as a god, I did not lie,
In that to me Nausicaa was and is
The goddess, who revived my ebbing life,
And whose dear worship I will not let die,
Until my pyre is lit.

Yet the old bonds still held. The dream of home,
Of happy meeting with Penelope
And with the son whom I had barely seen,
Cherished for twenty years on land and sea,
By fires that nightly watched for Troy to fall,
Beneath Orion on the star-lit wave,
Yea, and in magic Circe's witching arms,

ODYSSEUS' REVERIE

Proved stronger in its influence, and, as if,
Unseen, Athene led me by the hand,
I passed reluctant on towards the feast.
I never saw her more, but when I rose
And told my name, from where the women stood,
Clustered outside, I heard a long-drawn sigh,
As from a maid that knows her dream come true
And that her lover is no nameless man.

Ah! there's Telemachus: to bid me rise
And settle some embittered endless feud
Between two greedy yokels grabbing both
At land that is not theirs. His duty keeps
Him happy in the common rut: he's wise
In all the little things that do not count,
But with no vision, no desire to fling
His settled state behind him and to sail
Beyond the horizon, careless what he found,
So that he lived each minute of the day.
He's all Penelope: no drop of mine
Ripples the even current of his blood.
Had I but wed Nausicaa and she
Borne me the son I dream of, he would have blown
To flame the ashes of my whitening fire.
On those wise ships of the Phaeacians,
Swift as birds' pinions, swift as human thought,
We would have chased the setting sun to rest,
Rent the dark veil that shrouds the outer seas,
And bid Atlantis hail him sovereign lord.

ODYSSEUS' REVERIE

Then leaving him enthroned, I should have searched
Deep in the heart of the alluring west,
To find if there were haply any truth
In Old Teiresias and his prophecy
Of oars and winnowing fans and silly folk,
Who do not know wherewith to plough the sea.

(*Sings*) Oh! break your bonds, and fling
Fling them away:
Be deaf to ev'ry voice
That bids you stay.

Though duty chain, though love
Clasp you to home,
Life calls, the wide world calls:
Go forth to roam.

Strange seas will charm each day,
Too short, too rich:
And stranger landfalls each
New night bewitch.

Set sail! out oars! let naught
Lure from the track:
Love will throw wide her arms
When you come back.

CHRYSEIS—THE WILLING CAPTIVE

O H yes! I am old and withered, as you see,
A wisp of womanhood, the shrunken rind
Of what was once a maiden fair as you,
With face as lovely, hair as beautiful
And breasts and limbs as soft, alluring, white,
As yours are to your lovers. Me you scorn—
Me, wrinkled, grey, with breasts all fallen in,
This yellow skin and dull, these shrivelled limbs,
Like leaves in autumn. In your staring eyes
I see the lurking thought, it can not be
That ever she was loved of any man.
Doubtless you think that I was always here,
Busy about the temple, sweeping up,
Decking the altar, seeing all was clean
And ready for the daily sacrifice!
You may think so! you'll not believe that I
Had such a lover as you never saw,
Not in your wildest dreams at dead of night,
When you wake up and whisper on your bed
To your own ear of all that you would crave
In him that weds you. Ah! you see, I know!
I have not quite forgotten all my youth.

Life was to me one long, slow, quiet dream,
Until the day that filled the unhappy isle
With tears and lamentations, blood and fire,
When the black ships came winging o'er the waves
And poured upon the haven's sheltered beach
A host of warriors with dancing plumes
And mail that shone and dazzled like the sun.

CHRYSEIS

Our men-folk, all unskilled with sword and spear,
Fell at their onset: and we women fled,
Like startled deer to dim remoter glades,
And cowered quaking at Apollo's shrine.
I clung there with them, when the foe burst in,
Profaned the altar, swept us shipwards down
Aswirl on the resistless spate of war.
As I tossed, flotsam on the foremost wave,
The arms, that clasped me, burnt into my side
And deep within me sped the gathering flame.
Until he set me on his own broad ship,
I saw him not, and then upon mine eyes
Dawned glorious Agamemnon, king of men,
Mighty of thigh and arm and broad of breast,
Half-hidden in the blackness of his beard.
I had no thought of all the City's woe,
Of women widowed, children fatherless,
Homes burnt and plundered, nor of those that fell
Before the sword of Ares on that day.
As I sat there, all huddled with the rest
Weeping and moaning their sad slavery,
Lo! chanting through my heart sped the refrain,
'Should he not choose me, I shall surely die
And if he choose me, I shall live and love.'
I never loved before, but as I gazed deep
In covert wonder on that man of men,
My woman's heart went forth to his man's strength,
And with my lips I kissed the bruises left
By his tense fingers on my tingling arms.

CHRYSEIS

I prayed to Aphrodite, I, a maid,
To grant me, not a husband, nor a home,
Nor children, but one mad ecstatic night
On Agamemnon's breast: fervent I prayed
And Aphrodite hearkened: when at Troy
The Achacans gave the kings their honour's meed
She turned his eyes towards me, and he bade
Me to be led away towards his tent,
The foremost choice of all the captive maids.
The women folk kindly entreated me,
Bathed and anointed me and combed my hair,
Bidding me all the while forget my home,
My father, mother, and my brethren slain,
And meekly, humbly seek to please the king.
The fools! my eyes no longer turned to home,
To father, mother, brothers, dead and gone,
As utterly as they had never been.
My gaze was forward, upward, where the sun
Blotted from heaven the moon and all the stars.
And so they dressed me, and the slow day waned
And all the ways were darkened, and the while
The kings held mighty revel, musing I
Stayed with fond dreams my quenchless thirst for him.
At last the summons! and as I went in
To Agamemnon's tent, I bowed my neck
And said, 'My Lord, be gracious to maid
Who hopes to gain some favour in your sight.'
He lifted up my chin, bent down his head,
Gazing behind the shining of my eyes,

CHRYSEIS

Then laughed, 'It was for beauty's sake alone
That I chose you and have I won withal
A heart to love me as I would be loved?
Ah! is it so? I see it is, and swear
That I will have and hold you here, until
Troy sinks in flames: and when we set our sails
For hollow Argos, you shall go along
With me: let Clytaemnestra rave her fill,
I will not part with you until I die.'
And then he kissed me, whispering in my ear
Words that e'en now my heart forbids me speak,
And laying me upon his kingly couch
Taught me to be a woman and to love.
Ah! happy moon! Did ever such moon shine
For any bride and bridegroom on this earth?
He feasted on my body, I on his,
And from the love that burned within my soul,
His soul caught fire, and in the double flame
Our being melted into one hot stream,
Whose heat abides through all my days on earth,
Nor quenchable by Lethe's icy flood.

I had no thought of all the world outside,
Till one day Agamemnon smote my ears
With quick dread question, 'Girl, what should I take
As ransom to restore you to your sire,
Who asks for you in bright Apollo's name?'
All my heart died within me, and I fell
Aswoon across the bed with one wild cry
Of 'Never, never.' Then he took me up

CHRYSEIS

In his great arms and held me to his breast,
 Saying, 'Were Pelion on Ossa piled,
 All turned to gold, on gold Olympus piled,
 It would not reach the price that my heart sets
 Upon one fallen hair of your dear head.
 Trust me nor fear: I have sent the herald back
 With stinging words, like wasps, within his ear;
 He will not lightly ask your price again.
 Live, dear, and love, I will not let you go.'

So I lived trembling, and my father prayed
 To the Far-darter to avenge his priest
 His outraged altar and his name besmirched
 By this denial of me. Apollo heard
 And showered his darts upon their flocks and herds,
 And next upon their men folk, so they died
 And lay there stinking throughout all the camp.
 The living had no strength to bury them,
 Nor was there wood for burning. Then began
 Murmurs and grumblings—prayers to all the Gods
 To save the people, and when Kalchas told
 Why the Far-darter sent the pestilence,
 They clamoured for surrender: and my Lord
 Came to me, held me close, gazed in my eyes
 But spoke not: yet I saw his hidden thought
 And answered it. 'Let them all die, why care?
 The people cannot force you, nor the kings,
 Unless they win Achilles to their cry;
 And if he back them, turn on him and bid
 Him to give up Briseis, whom he loves

CHRYSEIS

And tells that one day she shall be his wife,
Instead of me. Honour and love, conjoined
With his fierce pride, will drive him to refuse,
And all the people's wrath will turn on him.'

Ten thousand curses light upon his soul!
And, like Prometheus, may the vultures feed
Upon his craven liver, who gave up
His minion tamely to my lord's demand!
And on my father!—dull old selfish man.
He never had a thought save for himself,
His honour, and Apollo's slighted name,
And haling me to Chryse, to be slave
Once more to dust and sweep and deck the shrine,
And make all ready for his tottering age.
Had he one thought of me, he would have come
And asked me how I fared, was it my will
To give up Agamemnon's bed and love,
And take in ample rich exchange there for
The dreary desert of my maiden life.

Tortures of Tantalus! may such woes be theirs,
Who tore me from my happiness and love.
Mine are the tortures, all was in my grasp,
Love's endless banquet spread before mine eyes,
And love's sweet nectar brimming at my lips,
And as I tasted, all was snatched away.
Yet I have had my hour. Ere my Lord came,
I knew not living—then he seized on me,
Made me his slave, and in that slavery
I found my liberty, full, round, complete,

CHRYSEIS

Joy, happiness, expansion of myself,
A revelation of the widest stretch
Of love's dominions, whereto all the world
Is but a heap of ashes, dusty, dead.
And oh! how sad the little song I made
In those brief days to please my lord and king!

Sings: Here I your captive stand,
Prey of war's lust,
Doing not as I would,
But as I must.

My love I did not give:
From me 'twas reft:
Yet should you cast it back,
I have naught left.

Do with me what you will—
Slave at your feet,
Queen in your loving arms,—
My joy's complete.

All that you robbed from me,
Freely I give.
Hold now and cherish it
Love and I live.

ANDROMACHE—THE CAPTIVE REBELLIOUS

TH E summons comes: and I must go prepare
My body for defilement: I must bathe
My limbs that they be soft and smooth and cool,
And scent my breasts, that they may smell more sweet
To my lord's lustful nostrils: then unveil
To profanation of his lecherous eyes
The holy altar, where once Hector knelt
In wedded love, adoring and adored.
Yet all's not lust: now while he revels there,
The wine, that heats his passion, sets his tongue
A-wag about me, and he proudly boasts
That he to-night will lie between the breasts
Where Hector lay, and kiss the very lips
That Hector kissed each day, as he set forth
To hurl the Achaeans back from dooméd Troy.
On other days his wife, or any one
Of his kept women, tempt his flesh the more.
But now, the base revenge of a mean man
Upon the weak, the love of triumphing
Over dead Hector, and his boasting there
To his wine-sodden kinglets set him on
To mouth the order in their tickled ears,
'Go, bid Andromache prepare herself
Against the night.' And so my body goes
And humbly decks itself to please his whim.
Lays itself down, when he may so command,
Rises when he may give his leave to go.

ANDROMACHE

'Tis true he rifles Hector's treasure house
 Yet touches not the treasure. That took wings
 And flew with Hector to the silent shades,
 When the bronze spear point cleft his tender throat.
 No! he has never held Andromache.
 She dwells apart, one half with Hector where
 He waits her coming in the Elysian fields,
 Half with his son, whom in those days of hope
 The purblind folk had named Astyanax,
 The city's king, lo! now the slave who hews
 Wood for his master at the palace gate.
 Yet it is better so: for did he feel
 A love within himself for me, myself,
 Some treacherous part might answer 'gainst my will,
 Bid me forget the past and feed my heart
 Upon the loving-kindness in its reach:
 For love to women is the breath of life,
 And if we have it not, we surely die.
 Now I go to him with a heart of hate,
 Hate, colder, harder than the frozen peaks
 Of high Olympus: and as I lie there
 I dream of Hector and of Hector's son,
 Hector, who nightly bids me come to him
 And join him in the shades, Astyanax,
 Who binds me fast to this abhorred life.
 I only live to rear him up to be
 A man, not all unworthy Hector's fame,
 Instructed in his father's knightly deeds,
 Wearing with pride the name his Trojans gave,

ANDROMACHE

And destined to avenge the fall of Troy,
His father's death, his captive mother's shame
On these Achaeans. Oh! he shall be free
As I shall ne'er be free, and breaking bonds
Win back his name and prove himself a man,
Like Theseus or like Jason, who built up
Kingdoms by their own might. All, all my wrongs,
My sorrow, slavery, and shame are nought,
If Hector's son but rise to Hector's height.

I shall not live to see it: but when death
Brings to me Hector's second bridal gifts,
With my last breath, I'll bind Astyanax
By solemn oaths, that, when he wins his realm,
Women shall not be chattels, empty hulks,
Whose owner loads them with what stuff he will,
And sends them forth to this port or to that,
Under a master who directs their voyage,
But free, themselves, to cross the sea of life,
Trim their own sails to zephyr or to gale,
Set their own course and handle their own helm,
That, or they founder, or they make the port,
Their fate's their own. Slaves we have always been!
Why, when Troy fell, 'twas like a cattle fair,
We women standing there, a huddled herd
To be divided out, three to this lord
And two to that: and we must bow ourselves
Beneath the yoke, labour to give them ease,
And at their pleasure furnish forth their beds.
And ev'n in marriage 'tis the man can pick
And choose which maiden he will have for bride

ANDROMACHE

From out a thousand, and the huckst'ring sire
Hands o'er the girl, without regard to her,
When he has settled what the price shall be,
How many oxen for his daughter's flesh,
Grasping his profit, careless if she be
Cherished or tortured, honoured or defiled.

I found my happiness: but yet 'twas chance
That cast me into Hector's loving arms,
A wife, whose husband was the world to her
And all the heavens. He gave my senses ease,
Full satisfaction of my corporal self,
Made me the mother of a noble boy
To suck my breasts, and set me on the height
With those who gave their sons to die for Troy.
And more, he furnished to my woman's mind
The sense of all adventure, the gay heart
That dances out to seek the blows of fate,
The mortal chances of the battlefield,
That endless quest of the mysterious sea,
All the romance, that lies about the world
And in the heavens above it. We attained
The true communion of speaking souls
And that diviner phase, when half-born thought,
Stirring unconscious in twin-lover heart,
Hears, ere it quicken, harmonized response
Of wedded sympathy, transcending speech.
All mine was his, his mine, whereby I know
His boy the inheritor of all the best
Noblest and most adventurous on this earth.

ANDROMACHE

I have grasped the truest and have held the best
Of earth's bestowal. Yet 'twas naught but chance—
A chance I would give to ev'ry woman born,
To make or mar the fortunes of her life
By her own choice, to take this man or that,
As this or that may seek her for his mate,
Not custom-bound nor forced, as I am now,
To yield herself a humble sacrifice
At others bidding, not her own free gift.

Behold us with our bodies made for love,
Our smoothness and our softness, all the lure
Of beauty that fills men with wild desire,
And all the subtle differences of sex,
Entwined in movement, thought, emotion, speech,
That can bind men to us in life-long love.
Why are we made so? save to give us choice,
Which man we take to lie upon our hearts
And sow the seed of children, whom we feed
In our own bodies, and, when we bring forth,
We nourish them with the milk of our own breasts.
One hour, one union sees the man's part done.
We are the mines that breed in secret depths
The jewels of the future. All mankind
Is of our making. Then be ours the choice
What father we shall take to sow the seed.
And if we choose amiss, then set us free
To choose again. So every child that's born
Shall be the fruit of passion perfected,
Which we shall strive to build to perfect love,

ANDROMACHE

Life-long abiding, and triumphant still
Beyond death's shades, as Hector's shines and mine.
Then, shall be born a race of demi-gods,
Radiant in beauty, dowered with noble strength,
With senses all awake to all delight,
With tongues to sing in hymns of lofty strain
Their joy in all that love and life can give,
And hearts and minds to make this sorry earth
All misery dreams that it might ever be.

Ah! here he comes who had made worth the past
Were it as full of sorrow as of joy,
Who lights for me this bitter slavery
With living happiness and springing hope.
Come, my Astyanax, lay your body, worn
With toil unworthy of the son of Kings,
Here in your mother's arms and let her feel
Again the clasp of Hector on her own.
Lie there, my darling, head upon my breast,
And let us dream awhile, that we three stand,
We three together, on Troy's battlements
On our last day of earthly happiness.
No, look not up: 'tis not for you I weep.
Ah Hector why. . . nay do not turn your head
Nor stab my sorrow with your father's eyes.

CIRCE'S APOLOGY

WHY am I changed? Why have I let this man
And his companions sail away unscathed?
Why ceased to hate? To hate! But why, dear maids,
Why should I hate the thing that I despise?
I, the dread goddess of the human voice,
Daughter of Helios, heir to all his lore,
Secreted, pondered, ere Deucalion's flood
Washed the first litter of this teeming breed
Down to the slime they sprang from! I, who know
The weakness, lightness of the fickle crew,
The greed, the vanity, that sway their wills,
As winds sway willows! Tempt their starting eyes
With hackneyed lures, they cannot see the springe,
Although their grey-beards and their mouthing priests
Prate themselves hoarse about the selfsame traps,
That maimed their fathers! I, a goddess born,
Were it my will, could have set down my fane
In their thronged cities, drawn them gaping in
To worship, and entreat me intercede
With my great sire, that his life-giving beams
Swell their slow grain and ripe their laggard fruit,
Or with Poseidon, that their argosies
Ride out his billows, when they buffet back
The clinching winds. To these and kindred prayers,
Born of their sordid, earthy appetites,
I should have hearkened daily, taking toll
Of their prosperity in reeking blood
Of sacrifice, that fouled my nostrils, quick
To joy in scent of sea-blown sun-warmed air.

CIRCE'S APOLOGY

And the poor credulous fools would hymn my praise,
When grim necessity might seem to bend
Her adamantine laws to fit their gain,
Making as loud and wise lament, when fate,
Provoked by their own folly, sheathed her sword
In their protesting throats. Why with this shape
And voice I could have won the wisest man
To cast to Aeolus' infuriate blasts
His duty, honour and nobility,
Yea and his wisdom also, challenging
The Paphian Queen for her supremacy.

I could, but would not. I had learnt too well
The jovial brutishness of rampant males:
Nor would I dim my bright serenity
With silly women's patent trickery,
Nor raffish goddesses' scarce-veiled intrigues.
No, no, I weighed the loves of Gods and men
And found them wanting, naught to counterpoise
The immortal treasure they would have me spend
To give them joy. The brightness of the rays
Of my sun-father, cleanness of the sea
And its unsullied wave were warp and woof
Of me. I made retire to this far isle
Of contemplation, safe removed from marts
Of men and crowded courts of Zeus, enroofed
By the high temple of my father's beams,
And moated in my grandsire's healing flood,
To shape myself by my own will divine
To that which I would be. This is my realm,

CIRCE'S APOLOGY

This girdled island, whence the eye can range
The desert ocean, meeting no affront
Of rival kingdoms challenging my sway,
No broad-beamed traders laden to the deck
With bartered merchandise, no pirates bent
To rob the gains of craft by force of arms.
My frontier is the ocean's circling rim,
His waves my countless guards, these sunken reefs
And jutting promontories my sure defence.
Behold my capital:—this palace, set
In grassy lawns, aslope to the sheer edge
Of beetling precipices: portals wide
Framing the hammered silver of the sea,
Halls light as open sky, verandahs broad
To lie adream in through the noonday heat,
And my brave watch-tower, lifting high to heaven
The far perspective of enraptured eyes.

And I have chosen you to keep with me,
Daughters of springs and groves and holy streams
That hasten seaward, virgin nymphs unsoiled
By earth-born passion, uncontaminate
Of Aphrodite's more recondite lust.
To each of you I have assigned her task,
Strewing of beds and blankets, setting forth
Of tables, care of wine and fire to heat
Water for bathing, ordered by one rule
That no confusion mar the daily round.

By order, I gain leisure, not to waste
On banquets, wantoning or idle toys,

CIRCE'S APOLOGY

But to win knowledge of the godhead born
Within me, and in men whose speech I use.
Much have I garnered in the coursing years,
And daily Helios, my splendid sire,
Stays the sun's chariot o'er the gleaming isle
To pass the news of high Olympus' gods
And mortal men and all they do at feast
And dance, in home and agora. His bright
All piercing eyes cleave through their flimsy veils
Of comely outward seeming, and reveal
Their hid desires, base inconsistencies
And dull neglect of all that makes life worth.
Earth do I know and heaven, nor of the sea
And the dim world beneath it is my lore
Less perfected. At the tide's height each day
In a secluded cove, where one tall pine,
Lone sentinel against the invading sea,
Rustles all night above a laughing brook,
That chatters round his feet and down the face
Of ivy-headed cliffs to the shell beach,
My mother Perse seeks the weed-fringed rocks
And, mirrored in a sea-pool, combs her hair,
Chanting her rhythmic song of Ocean's realm,
Of cool sunk grottoes and of swimming trees,
Bowers of sea-nymphs and Tritons, gay with shells,
Dumb fishes pasturage, and of the love
Wherein the waves strain daily up to clasp
Their mistress moon, then ebb to sullen deeps
Disconsolate. I ponder all, and use

CIRCE'S APOLOGY

The lore I gather, not like Aietes
For evil deeds that joy his perverse mind,
But to seek out the hidden soul of God,
Of man's dark fate and of blind laws, that hold
The settled stars in place and guide the dance
Of wayward planets. In the island's round
I turned my power to bind you maidens so
That your obedience marches with the rule
Of your own natures and your wills are free.
Nor did I tame the mountain-ranging wolves
And pards by evil drugs, but by my art
Converted them to playmates, that no more
With claw and tooth they rend the gentler beasts
But fawn with long fond tails.

Then lo! to break
My quiet scholar peace, come bursting in
These swaggering mariners, who slay my deer
And hammer on my doors, careless alike
Of my smooth lawns, my burnished palaces
And playful beasts. Myself they rudely hale
From singing at my loom. Charmless my voice
Falls on their untuned ears. Their eyes are blind
To the inner godhead of my woman's form.
They crouch them down and hurl them on the meat
I set before them, like brute beasts that know
No law save appetite. Forgetful all
Of trusty comrades, and of gallant ship,
Of their great captain and their homeland dear
They gorge in gluttony. I knew my rod

CIRCE'S APOLOGY

Had power to smite them to the outer sties
To wallow in their natural swinishness,
And knowing smote.

Odysseus came at even and I mixed
The selfsame posset, but, the while he drank,
And slowly satisfied his body's need,
His steady eye held me with visioned gaze,
Piercing the marrow of my magic power,
Robbing my rod of all its wizardry,
His mind within him on its throne secure
From all my venom. Faltering I smote.
He lolled back in his chair with careless smile,
Toying with 's goblet, when I clasped his knees,
Proffering the bait that any woman holds
For any man. His starving senses leapt
Into his glowing eyes: yet he held back,
Until I swore his manhood should go free
From all my arts: nor would he grant his lips
Touch my choice dainties, till my rod reversed
The beastly transformation of his men.

He bent my will to his, for his whole mind
Was concentrated on a single end.
He won his safety, pardon and release
Of all his comrades, guidance on his way
Through the dark portals of the under-world
And past the myriad dangers that beset
His homing voyage. My mind's secret hoards
Ruthless, he pillaged, using them, myself,
My hospitality of bed and board,

CIRCE'S APOLOGY

To reach his heart's sole object—swift return
To his Penelope, his Ithaca.
I knew, but bowed, child-like, in reverence
Of a sure will, a strong clear-visioned soul,
Whose centred flame melted opposing bars
To flow in his wished mould. I loved him then,
Not with hot passion but with strong desire
Of mind for equal mind, which fused in one
Had sent Zeus hurtling from his throne and built
A nobler world. I loved: yet stayed the flood
And sped him on his way. His heart was fast
To his sole woman, and I would not change
My quiet ordered state, my dear repose
For love's unrest,—no, not though I were wife
Of wise Odysseus, King of mortal men.

CALYPSO'S PRAYER

BELOW the horizon drops the raft, the sail,
And all of love that I have ever known,
A mockery, a counterfeit but yet
All I have known—all I shall ever know
In my long immortality. And now
'Tis gone and I am left alone, alone,
In my lone cave to fret my chafing breast
Against my god-head's laws. On this dead isle,
In these untrafficked waters buried deep,
Have I been pent, since its fresh peaks thrust up
From chaos' welter and the younger gods
Began their rule, to pine through empty years,
Until a new race spring to cast them down,
As Zeus cast Saturn, setting period
To this unending nullity, that knows
No change. For what change is there here? Tides ebb,
Tides flow, moons wax, moons wane, suns rise, suns set,
The season's endless chain winds round and round,
Yet 'spite all change, all's still the changeless same
Which I have gazed on through immortal years
And shall gaze on for ever, still unchanged,
Save that I yearn, as I had never yearned,
To feel the spring of mortal heart to heart,
The sharp swift joy unknown of deathless gods.

Here was no god for me, and no man came
Until the sea spewed out upon the beach
This earth-born stranger, and my sex leapt forth
To take him to my bed and learn love's rites.
He lay unwilling in my willing arms,

CALYPSO'S PRAYER

Clasping me to him, but his soul had ta'en
Swift wings of thought to far Penelope.
To him I gave all that was mine to give
And he gave nothing but the rind to me,
Who would have sucked the fruit of love to dry.
Yet I had him to spend my heart upon,
And I held what I held, until the Gods
In august conclave planned my robbery
And his return. Helpless but loth, I bowed
To their decree, and showed him tall dry trees,
Gave axe and adze and hammer, hardly then
Full knowing why my heart was quick with pain.

In pang on pang it leapt at each resound
Of ringing hammer on the building raft.
The stream of time, which erst had flowed unfelt,
Now burnt like acid, and I stitched his sails
With sorrow's sinews, learning at the last
What shrewder zest the bitter drop of time
Adds to love's chalice. Yet all was not plain,
Until to my persuasion to abide,
And be set free from death, exchanging me
For meaner mortal wife, he cleft the knot
And loosed the riddle of the keener joy.
My pleadings but confirmed his settled will,
His surer instinct, to return and grasp
What happiness he might, before the shears
Of Atropos clicked through his meted thread,
Saying, 'Be thou not wroth, fair goddess queen,
Far comelier than wise Penelope,

CALYPSO'S PRAYER

She is a mortal and to her I cleave,
And thee I quit who know'st not age nor death.'

There lies the secret. Oh! Zeus pluck me out
From this dead sea of immortality,
Unbourned by birth and death nor stirred by tides
Of shifting time. Cast in life's running stream
The drop of my existence, though it flow
To lose itself in Lethe. Oh! take back
Take back my immortality. Reverse
For me the boon unwise Aurora asked
For her Tithonus. Let me ripe and fade
As mortals do. Prick me with death's sharp spur.
Set life a-gallop and fill ichor veins
With throbbing ecstasy of coursing blood.
Oh! take it back! I gladly give it all
To live a mortal, knowing each brief year
Dwindles my destined heap. How love would blaze
With death's cold blast to fan his rising flame!
And even sorrow linger o'er her cup
From sure foreknowledge that the end of all
Is swift oblivion! Oh! stretch out thy hand!
Make me true woman, granting only this,
The briefest span to find and woo and win
My own Odysseus, drink his soul in wine
Of fevered passion, print the kiss of love
On lips, that rush to set their seal on mine
Ere death shall stamp his image on us both.
And for that moment take in full exchange
The halt procession of immortal years.

